

## **Testimony Supporting Substitute Bill SB 36 Senate Health Committee**

Elizabeth Muckley, O.D., F.A.A.O.  
CEO & Executive Director, The Ohio Optometric Association  
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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Senate Health Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Ohio Optometric Association (OOA) and the patients we serve across this state, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Substitute Bill SB 36 to modernize Ohio's optometric scope of practice. In addition to my testimony, I am submitting written testimony for the substitute bill from both Dr. Michael Earley, who most recently served as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at the Ohio State University College of Optometry and who previously testified before this committee, as well as testimony from Dr. Tom Nye, who served in the past as President of the State Vision Professionals Board. Also enclosed with my testimony is a letter of support for Substitute SB 36 from AMVETS, a national veteran's organization that represents more than 600,000 veterans living in Ohio.

Over the course of the three hearings held on SB 36 this General Assembly, and the three hearings last General Assembly on SB 129, we have listened carefully to the questions from committee members that were asked to both supporters and opponents of the bill. In working with Senator Cirino and Senator Lang, our association identified that certain members of the committee, while appreciating the rigorous training and education standards contained in the original bill, continued to struggle with the issue of patient safety. Like you, Ohio's optometrists are committed to ensuring that Ohioans receive safe, cost-effective, high-quality eye care delivered by highly trained and educated doctors of optometry. As I have previously testified before this committee, our members have been and remain committed to the highest level of vision care for your constituents and the OOA would never ask you to grant us the right to perform any procedure for which optometrists were not properly trained and educated.

The OOA worked with our bill sponsors to formulate a substitute bill that will make our bill the toughest in the country of any other state that already has granted optometrists enhanced practice privileges. The substitute bill significantly elevates training standards beyond those contained in the "as introduced" version of SB 36. In addition to the nationally recognized 32-hour didactic and clinical course required in the 14 states that already authorize both laser and injection privileges, optometry students and currently licensed doctors of optometry will be required to complete supervised, precepted training that meets the same minimum requirements established for ophthalmology residents by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. That training must be conducted by an ophthalmologist or by an optometrist who has been formally approved and credentialed as a preceptor by the Ohio Vision Professionals Board. There will now be minimum procedural equivalence.

Both students and post graduate doctors of optometry would complete a minimum of 5 YAG capsulotomies, 5 laser trabeculoplasties, 4 iridotomies, and 3 chalazion excisions as specified by

the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. Of course, many students and doctors will exceed these precepted procedural minimums just like ophthalmology residents. Doctors of optometry would also be permitted under the bill to achieve certification in the individual procedures as the bill does not mandate certification across all procedures, ensuring appropriate, targeted competency.

The substitute bill also further strengthens certain patient safety issues raised by a few committee members by clarifying clear specific prohibitions. Optometrists will not administer vaccinations under this bill, intravenous injections or injections directly into the globe of the eye. In addition, while removing benign lid lesions is still allowable in the updated bill, an additional patient safety mechanism was installed that specifies this procedure is only permitted as long as it does not involve the lid margin or require reconstruction. Lastly, no laser, eyelid, or injection procedures authorized under the bill may be performed on patients under the age of 18.

As a result of these enhanced statutory training requirements, several provisions governing the duties of the Ohio Vision Professionals Board will be updated accordingly. The Board already has a long-standing record of protecting the public through rigorous licensure and enforcement standards and is nationally recognized as a leader in regulating optometric practice. These changes further reinforce that role, and our association will continue working with the Board to implement any requirements contained in this legislation to ensure the utmost patient safety.

Patient safety is paramount to this committee and to our profession. Our members are willing to demonstrate that commitment by meeting higher standards, completing enhanced training, and accepting clear regulatory oversight. With this substitute bill, patients and policymakers alike can be confident that crucial vision care delivered by highly trained and educated optometrists in Ohio will continue to be grounded in rigorous education, strict licensure, and an uncompromising commitment to public safety as scope of practice evolves.

This legislature clearly has demonstrated its trust in optometrists through our willingness to care for Medicaid patients when others have not, to deliver essential vision care to children in both rural and urban communities through our charitable foundation and the new OhioSEE program, and to remain accessible to both young and elderly patients by practicing in nearly every county.

For the Ohio Optometric Association, patient safety is not negotiable. While other professions have come to you numerous times to enhance their scopes of practice, and are doing so once again this session, Substitute SB 36 would be the first update to Ohio optometry's scope of practice in 18 years. Safety is our highest priority as we responsibly modernize optometric care for the benefit of Ohio's patients.

Thank you for your time and with the permission of Chairman Huffman, I would like to turn this over to our next witness and then we can answer any questions you may have.